

Conference targets tainted groundwater ONTARIO

By ANDREW SILVA
San Bernardino County Sun

ONTARIO — A little more than two years after groundwater supplies were found to be contaminated with a rocket fuel component, technology is becoming available to clean the stubborn chemical from water.

More than 250 scientists, water officials and regulators from throughout the country met Thursday for the first day of a two-day conference on perchlorate, which has contaminated groundwater in parts of San Bernardino County and in as many as 20 other states.

It may be the first conference of its kind in the country, said Robert Martin, general manager of the East Valley Water District, which coordinated the event at the Doubletree Hotel in Ontario.

"The problem is there has been no method to remove it from drinking water," Martin said.

A 3½-mile plume of the salt is migrating west from the former Lockheed Martin Corp. plant in Mentone. It has affected wells serving Redlands, Loma Linda and Riverside. Rialto has some contamination from another source.

Perchlorate is difficult to remove because it dissolves so completely in water. There are now at least two methods available to clean contaminated water, though none has gotten formal approval from the state yet.

In the San Gabriel Valley, which also has extensive contamination, a plant capable of

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Gathering targets tainted water

Scientists, water officials and regulators from across the country have gathered in Ontario for a conference on perchlorate, a chemical that has contaminated water in parts of SB County.

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purifying up to 4 million gallons per day is expected to be ready by summer.

Calgon Carbon Corp. has modified a process to remove nitrate and now handle perchlorate. The problem may be the

cost, between \$200 and \$270 an acre-foot of water. (An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons).

But that is still cheaper than importing water at more than \$400 per acre-foot, said Charles Drewry, Calgon business development manager.

The first full-scale project began operating just this year in the Sacramento area on the 1,300-acre Aerojet site, which has been con-

taminated since the 1950s. Engineers there employ a process that uses bacteria to get rid of the perchlorate.

"So far, it seems to be humming right along and seems to be economically feasible," said Michael Girard of Aerojet.

The cost is about \$80 an acre-foot, he said.

Cost will be the key for how water providers in San Bernardino and Riverside counties deal with the is-

sue once one of the processes proves itself in the next few years, said Martin, of the East Valley Water District.

Wells that show readings about 18 parts per billion are either shut down or mixed with clean water to dilute the contaminant. It may be cheaper to shut down a well and import water from somewhere else, Martin said.

"The bottom line is what can you sell your customers,"